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Editor's Introduction: Rediscovering Early Phenomenological Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have witnessed a surge of interest in the early phases of the phenomenological movement. However, early phenomenological aesthetics has so far received very little attention in the current "Renaissance" of early phenomenology, albeit that the early phenomenologists made significant contributions to aesthetics and even argued for a special affinity between aesthetics and phenomenology. They also took part in the exceptionally lively debates of early 20th-century German aesthetics, which in general has remained all too underappreciated in today's research. This special issue of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* aims to kindle new interest in early phenomenological aesthetics and its wider intellectual contexts. In this introductory article, I will first provide a short overview of early phenomenology and then describe the main topics, proponents, and publications of early phenomenological aesthetics, setting them in the context of early 20th-century German aesthetics.

KEYWORDS

Phenomenological aesthetics; history of phenomenology; psychological aesthetics; Neo-Kantianism; Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft

I. Introduction

Without a doubt, the beginning of the phenomenological movement in the first decades of the 20th century counts among the most intellectually fertile periods in modern philosophy. In a span of just a few decades, Edmund Husserl and his early followers took full use of the new phenomenological method and made significant contributions to philosophy of mind, epistemology, ontology, social philosophy—and aesthetics. However, due to unfortunate historical circumstances, many of the early phenomenologists were largely forgotten after the Second World War and have been rediscovered only in recent years. This has led to what has been aptly called a "Renaissance" of early phenomenology,[1] a surge of interest in the early history of the phenomenological movement. Numerous conferences, a flood of articles and books, and the establishment of The North American Society for Early Phenomenology have made interest in early phenomenology one of the most noteworthy trends in contemporary phenomenological research.

This interest has been intense but selective. Much attention has been devoted to the idealism—realism debate between Husserl and his followers, the nature of intentionality, emotions and affects, religious experiences, and sociality.[2] Also, one topic of recent

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interest has been the significant role women philosophers—such as Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Edith Stein, Else Voigtländer, and Gerda Walther—played in the original movement.[3]

In contrast, the topic of early phenomenological aesthetics has received remarkably little attention in the research literature—except for Roman Ingarden's thinking, which, of course, has become a staple reference point in aesthetics and art research. A landmark study in the history of early phenomenological aesthetics, Gabriele Scaramuzza's *Le origini dell'estetica fenomenologica* (1976), is almost 50 years old and still counts as perhaps the best work in the field. Georg Bensch's *Vom Kunstwerk zum ästhetischen Objekt* (1994) looks at the early phases of phenomenological aesthetics in Germany and France; most interestingly, Bensch interprets the early aesthetics of Georg Lukács from a phenomenological perspective. A special issue of the journal *Axiomathes* in 1998 includes articles on the aesthetics of lesser-known early phenomenologists, such as Johannes Daubert, Aloys Fischer, and Oskar Becker.[4] Daniela Angelucci's *L'oggetto poetico* (2004) looks at the phenomenological aesthetics of Waldemar Conrad, Roman Ingarden, and Nicolai Hartmann, concentrating on their thoughts on literature. Hans Rainer Sepp's and Lester Embree's *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics* (2010) pays attention to a good number of early phenomenologists. In the current flood of publications on early phenomenology, aesthetics has so far played a very small, if not to say non-existent, role.

The reason for this lack of attention is up for speculation. As Sepp and Embree point out in the preface of their *Handbook*, "contributions to this field have continually been made in the phenomenological tradition from very early on, but, so to speak, along the side."[5] By this they mean that aesthetics has always had a marginal role in phenomenology, albeit that some of its practitioners have put a lot of thought into aesthetic problems and have even argued for a privileged relationship between aesthetics and phenomenology. Many of the main figures of early phenomenological aesthetics—Moritz Geiger, Nicolai Hartmann, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Fritz Kaufmann—died while preparing their main works on aesthetics, and these incomplete texts have been published posthumously, long after the heyday of early phenomenology, when works of their successors—such as Roman Ingarden and Mikel Dufrenne—had already eclipsed them in breadth and systematicity. Most texts in the corpus have not been translated, and much material lies unpublished in the archives of the Bavarian State Library.[6]

This should be by no means taken as a sign that early phenomenological aesthetics does not merit attention. The early phenomenologists wrote extensively on the nature of aesthetic objects, values, and experiences; they debated the very nature of aesthetics as a science and outlined its relationship to psychology and art research; they put much emphasis on the relationship between art, aesthetics, and phenomenology in ways that prefigure later phenomenologists. They also made the case that phenomenology has a special affinity to aesthetics: they claimed that phenomenology is the essential method of aesthetics, and aesthetics is conversely the essential domain for the application of the phenomenological method. Finally, the early phenomenologists took part in the exceptionally lively debates of early 20th-century German aesthetics, which today remains all too underappreciated.

This special issue of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* aims to kindle new interest in early phenomenological aesthetics and its wider contexts. In this introductory

article, I will first provide a short overview of early phenomenology and then proceed to describe the main topics, proponents, and publications of early phenomenological aesthetics, setting them in the wider context of early 20th-century German aesthetics.

II. A very short history of early phenomenology[7]

When Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) published his *Logical Investigations* in 1900–01, his new method began quickly to attract followers who were drawn by the prospect of describing the life of consciousness without presuppositions or theoretical speculation. Many of these early followers were, in the words of Dermot Moran and Rodney K. B. Parker, among "the most brilliant and original philosophical minds of their generation in Germany",[8] and within a few years, the phenomenological movement began to flourish, producing significant contributions in virtually all areas of philosophy at an astounding rate.

Among the first to understand the potential of Husserl's new method was a group of students at the University of Munich. They had originally studied under the eminent psychologist Theodor Lipps (1851–1914) and were members of the Academic Society for Psychology (*Akademischer Verein für Psychologie*) Lipps had founded in 1895. This group of students was initially attracted to Lipps's method of descriptive psychology, but when Johannes Daubert (1877–1947) introduced Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, they were soon convinced of Husserl's critique of psychologism and turned their allegiance from Lipps's psychology to Husserl's phenomenology. This shift gave birth to the so-called Munich Circle of early phenomenology. Members of this group included, in alphabetical order, Maximilian Beck (1887–1950), Theodor Conrad (1881–1969), Hedwig Conrad-Martius (1888–1966), Aloys Fischer (1880–1937), Moritz Geiger (1880–1937), Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889–1977), Alexander Pfänder (1870–1941), Adolf Reinach (1883–1917), and Else Voigtländer (1882–1946), among others. Max Scheler (1874–1928) also attended the meetings of the Society.

At the same time as phenomenology was debated in Munich, Husserl himself was teaching in Göttingen and had already attracted a group of students, the so-called *Urschüler*, or "original students". Among them were Wilhelm Schapp (1884–1965), who would become a significant philosopher of storytelling, and Waldemar Conrad (1878–1915), who had a significant role in the formation of phenomenological aesthetics. Starting from 1905, many members of the Munich Circle moved to Göttingen to study under Husserl, resulting in the so-called "Munich invasion of Göttingen". The *Urschüler*, the Munich invaders, and some newcomers, such as Roman Ingarden (1893–1970), Fritz Kaufmann (1891–1958), Gustav Špet (1879–1937), and Edith Stein (1891–1942), began to hold weekly meetings, giving birth to the second main group of early phenomenology, the so-called Göttingen Circle. This development has been identified as the beginning of the phenomenological movement proper.[9]

This led to the foundation of the Göttingen Philosophical Society (*Göttingen Philosophische Gesellschaft*) in 1911. Then, in 1913, the first volume of the *Jahrbuch der Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* was published. This volume contained Husserl's *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, which caused a rift between Husserl and his early followers regarding the existence of external reality: Husserl had declared his allegiance to transcendental

idealism, which his followers interpreted as entailing the rejection of the mind-independent existence of the world, while many of his followers were avowed realists in this issue.[10] It was during this time that Adolf Reinach's realist phenomenology began to exert more influence on them than the transcendental idealism of Husserl.[11]

In 1916, Husserl moved to Freiburg im Breisgau and assumed the position of full professor of philosophy. By this time, the Munich and Göttingen Circles had dispersed, and no new circle was formed around Husserl in Freiburg, although Husserl kept on attracting new students, such as Oskar Becker (1889–1964), Eugen Fink (1905–1975), Aron Gurwitsch (1901–1973), and Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995). Instead, a new group, the so-called Bergzabern Circle, had been gathering in Theodor Conrad's and Hedwig Conrad-Martius's farm in Bad Bergzabern. This group included, along with the Conrads, Jean Héring (1890–1966), Alexandre Koyré (1892–1964), Hans Lipps (1889–1941), and Alfred von Sybel (1885–1945), who had already been members of the Munich and Göttingen Circles.

There was no definite endpoint for early phenomenology. Instead, there was a slow dissolution that began with Husserl's move to Freiburg and the outbreak of the First World War. Those who survived the war—Adolf Reinach, who had become the central figure of Göttingen's realist phenomenology, fell in the battlefield[12]—kept on doing research, but the movement had lost the intense collaborative character it had during "the phenomenological spring" before the Great War.[13] Then a series of events diminished the original movement even further: the arrival of Martin Heidegger and existential phenomenology in the late 1920s; the deaths of Geiger, Husserl, Pfänder, and Scheler; and most crushingly, the rise of Nazism and the outbreak of the Second World War. Beck, Geiger, Kaufmann, and von Hildebrand fled the Nazis to the United States; Edith Stein died in Auschwitz. After the war, very little remained of the original movement. Even though some of its members, such as Conrad-Martius, von Hildebrand, and Ingarden, remained active, the interest in early phenomenology was eclipsed by existential phenomenology *à la* Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. This shift in interest led to many early phenomenologists being largely forgotten after the Second World War. Phenomenology itself remained very much alive and established itself as a significant philosophical movement, spreading across the globe and taking various shapes and forms. Now, the wealth of the early phenomenological movement is being discovered again after decades of undue neglect.

III. Early phenomenological aesthetics: main figures, context, and core ideas

As is well known, Husserl himself had little systematic interest in aesthetics problems, at least when aesthetics is taken in a narrow sense to include questions of beauty, art, and the like. Husserl's most well-known contributions to aesthetics are his lectures on image consciousness, which were published in 1980 in *Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung* (Hua 23). Far less known are Husserl's meditations on beauty in the recently published volume *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins, Teilband II: Gefühl und Wert* (Hua 43/2). Overall, Husserl's aesthetics has received relatively little attention; the first book dedicated to Husserl's aesthetics, Paul Crowther's *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Consciousness and Phantasy*, was published as late as in 2022 (see Fotini Vassiliou's review in this issue).

The development of phenomenological aesthetics was largely left to Husserl's early followers. The credit for the first attempt to describe aesthetic objects using the phenomenological method is usually given to Husserl's *Urschüler* Waldemar Conrad, whose book-length article "Der ästhetische Gegenstand" was published in three parts in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in 1908–09. As the article's title suggests, Conrad applies the phenomenological method to distinguish the essential features of musical, literary, and visual artworks. Besides its careful descriptions of various artworks (see Thomas Petraschka's article in this issue), Conrad's essay is noteworthy for its methodological considerations on how phenomenology can be applied to aesthetic phenomena in the first place.

Overall, interest in aesthetics was most prominent among the Munich phenomenologists. Aesthetic issues were often discussed in the Academic Society for Psychology, and the Society's founder, Theodor Lipps, was an influential representative of psychological aesthetics and a developer of the so-called aesthetics of empathy (*Einfühlungsästhetik*). In contrast to Lipps, the members of the Munich Circle were more interested in the objective features of aesthetic values and artworks than the subjective features of aesthetic experiences. This emphasis on objectivity was inspired not only by Husserl but also by Dietrich von Hildebrand's father, the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921), whose book *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (1893) was discussed in the Society.[14] An early example of the objectivist tendency toward aesthetic values is witnessed by Aloys Fischer's habilitation thesis *Untersuchungen über den ästhetischen Wert* (1907, part of the work was published as *Zur Bestimmung des ästhetischen Gegenstandes*), which further influenced the younger members of the Circle.[15] Although Munich was an important center of avantgarde art at the turn of the 20th century (for example, the expressionist group Der Blaue Reiter was founded there in 1911), the Munich phenomenologists were more inclined toward realism and impressionism than the newest developments of modern art.[16]

The most prominent aesthetician of the Munich Circle was Moritz Geiger. Besides Fritz Kaufmann and Roman Ingarden, Geiger is rare among the early phenomenologists for devoting much of his career to aesthetics. An important early text is Geiger's extensive article "Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genusses" (1913), in which Geiger applies the phenomenological method to distinguish aesthetic pleasure from other forms of pleasure. The essay "Phänomenologische Ästhetik" (1925) is a seminal statement on the relationship between aesthetics and phenomenology (more on this essay below). Then, in 1928, Geiger published a collection of essays titled *Zugänge zur Ästhetik*, where he delineates his phenomenology of superficial and deep aesthetic experiences and his views on the psychological meaning of art (see Íngrid Vendrell Ferran's article in this issue). Geiger was planning to publish a systematic presentation of his aesthetics in a single work, but this book was never finished; Geiger escaped the Nazis to the USA in 1933, where he died in 1937. The unfinished book *Die Bedeutung der Kunst* was published posthumously in 1976 (parts of the book were published in English as *The Significance of Art* in 1986).

Another noteworthy—and perhaps the most curious—character in the history of early phenomenological aesthetics is Maximilian Beck, who has been aptly titled "the forgotten phenomenologist."[17] His gigantic, almost 1,300-page book *Wesen und Wert* (1925) is one of the largest, if not the largest, systematic treatises on aesthetics that the original

movement produced. Beck begins the book by outlining a phenomenology of perception and carefully distinguishing various types of values, then he moves on to develop an extensive theory of beauty and finishes the book with a systematic treatment of the arts. The Finnish philosopher Eino Krohn, who had a central role in introducing phenomenology in Finland in the 1920s, described the book as "one of the most complete and coherent studies in the new movement of aesthetics [i.e. objectivist aesthetics]."[18] Yet, for some reason, Beck's aesthetics has received next to no attention in research literature.[19]

Other members of the Munich Circle devoted less attention to aesthetics. I have already mentioned Aloys Fischer's habilitation thesis, which influenced the objectivist tendencies of early phenomenological aesthetics.[20] Hedwig Conrad-Martius was interested in the nature of light and colors, and her essay "Die Irrealität des Kunstwerkes" (1938) is an early foray into the phenomenological ontology of art (see Irene Breuer's article in this issue). Dietrich von Hildebrand was preparing a sizeable contribution to aesthetics at the time of his death, and the incomplete *Ästhetik* was published in 1977 (English translation *Aesthetics* in 2016). Max Scheler, who was among the most prominent philosophical figures in early 20th century Germany, never published anything dedicated solely to aesthetics, but his writings contain extensive discussions on aesthetic values, natural beauty, and artistic creativity.[21]

The members of the Göttingen Circle were less interested in aesthetic problems, with two prominent exceptions. Fritz Kaufmann wrote his habilitation thesis *Das Bildwerk als ästhetisches Phänomen* (1924) under Husserl's supervision. In the early 1940s, Kaufmann published two important texts on the philosophy of art: "Kunst und Phänomenologie" (1940) discusses, as the title suggests, the relationship between art and phenomenology, and "Kunst und Religion" (1941) discusses, in turn, the relationship between art and religion. Kaufmann was finalizing his main work on phenomenological aesthetics, *Das Reich des Schönen*, when he died, and the unfinished book was published posthumously in 1960. In this issue, Elio Antonucci explicates Kaufmann's phenomenological aesthetics by comparing it with Ernst Cassirer's Neo-Kantian aesthetics.

The second aesthetician to rise from the Göttingen Circle was the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden, who moved to the city in 1912. His early masterpiece, *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (1931, English translation *The Literary Work of Art* in 1973), in which Ingarden outlines a detailed phenomenological ontology of literary artworks, is without a doubt the most influential publication within the corpus of early phenomenological aesthetics. Ingarden supplemented this book with the monograph *Vom Erkennen des literarischen Kunstwerks* (originally published in Polish in 1937, then in German in 1968, and in English as *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* in 1973) in which he takes a detailed look at the phenomenology of the act of reading. The book *Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Kunst* (1962, English translation *The Ontology of the Work of Art* in 1989) widens Ingarden's scope to music, pictorial art, architecture, and film.

The first publications on phenomenological aesthetics came from the members of the Göttingen and Munich Circles, but as the phenomenological method began to spread wider, contributions began to appear from thinkers outside the original circles. Just to name a few: Walter Meckauer-Brelaus's "Aesthetische Idee und Kunsttheorie" was published in 1918 and Hans Mersmann's "Zur Phänomenologie der Musik" in 1925 in

Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft; Husserl's assistant Eugen Fink expanded Husserl's phenomenology of image-consciousness in his doctoral dissertation *Vergegenwärtigung und Bild* (1929); Oskar Becker, who is better known as a philosopher of mathematics, published the article "Von der Hinfälligkeit des Schönen und der Abenteuerlichkeit des Künstlers" in the *Jahrbuch* of 1929, which was published in honor of Husserl's 70th birthday. Becker's article is significant—among other things—in that it is an early example of Heidegger's influence on phenomenological aesthetics (see Benjamin Brewer's article in this issue). In the same year, Werner Ziegenfuß published his doctoral dissertation *Die phänomenologische Ästhetik*, which was the first attempt to present the aesthetics of the early phenomenological movement in a unified and critical manner. Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950), who never identified himself with the phenomenological movement although he was deeply influenced by it, embarked on the treacherous business of writing on aesthetics in his later career and died while finalizing his *Ästhetik* (the book was published posthumously in German in 1953 and in English with the title *Aesthetics* in 2014). Besides monographs and dissertations, the most important publication venues for early phenomenological aesthetics were the journals *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* and *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*.

Phenomenology spread quickly beyond the German borders, first around Europe and Japan, then across the globe. This also meant widening horizons for phenomenological aesthetics, which was developed, for example, by Antonio Banfi (1886–1957) in Italy, Kitarō Nishida (1870–1945) in Japan, and José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955) in Spain. After the Second World War, French phenomenologists, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), and Mikel Dufrenne (1910–1995), established France as the locus of phenomenological aesthetics. This special issue contains two articles on non-German contexts for early phenomenological aesthetics: Patrick Flack discusses the reception of phenomenology in the Soviet State Academy of Art Studies and Dalius Jonkus outlines the phenomenological aesthetics of the Lithuanian philosopher Vasily Sesemann (1884–1963).

It needs to be emphasized that phenomenological aesthetics did not develop in a vacuum. German aesthetics at the turn of the 20th century was exceptionally vital—the American aesthetician Thomas Munro would later describe this era by saying that the "[the German] output of books and articles on the subject [. . .] overshadowed that of all other countries put together"[22]—even if this phase in the history of aesthetics is nowadays unduly underappreciated. We can set the scene in a few broad strokes. In the latter half of the 19th century, speculative aesthetics in the style of Hegel, Schelling, and Schopenhauer had gone out of vogue, and two new approaches began to dominate German aesthetics: Neo-Kantianism and psychological aesthetics.

Neo-Kantian aesthetics saw a way forward for aesthetics by going back to Kant's critical philosophy. Neo-Kantianism was the dominant form of philosophy in Germany at the turn of the 20th century, and it developed into various schools.[23] The leading figure of Marburg Neo-Kantianism, Hermann Cohen (1842–1918), offers a novel commentary of Kant's third critique in *Kants Begründung der Aesthetik* (1889) and develops his system of aesthetics in the two-volume work *Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls* (1912). Cohen's student Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), who would become one of the leading German philosophers of his time, was constantly occupied by aesthetic problems in his philosophy of symbolic

forms (see Elio Antonucci's article in this issue). The main proponents of the Southwest School of Neo-Kantianism were less interested in aesthetic issues; their main contribution to aesthetics is Jonas Cohn's *Allgemeine Ästhetik* (1901). Finally, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), who was not a Neo-Kantian *per se* but closely related, exerted much influence on aesthetics at the turn of the 20th century through his ideas on hermeneutics and the notion of "lived experience" (*Erlebnis*).

The second approach was psychological aesthetics, which echoed the development of empirical psychology and the call to ground aesthetics in empirical research. Gustav Fechner (1801–1887), a pioneer of psychological aesthetics, famously demanded in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1876) that speculative philosophy, which imposes philosophical systems on aesthetic phenomena "from above" (*von oben*), needs to be replaced with an empirical, psychological approach, which attempts to find the laws of aesthetics "from below" (*von unten*) by studying actual empirical evidence. Robert Vischer (1847–1933) introduced the notion of *Einfühlung* ("feeling into", usually translated as "empathy"), which was to become the central concept of psychological aesthetics, in his doctoral dissertation *Über das optische Formgefühl* (1873). Roughly put, Vischer's notion of *Einfühlung* refers to the idea that when we experience an object as having an emotional character, it is because we have projected our own emotions into that object. The notion of *Einfühlung* was further developed by Theodor Lipps, who made it the cornerstone of his systematic two-volume treatise *Ästhetik* (1903–06). As I mentioned above, the phenomenologists of the Munich Circle were originally Lipps's students and were well aware of his stance on aesthetics. A leading proponent of psychological aesthetics at the time phenomenological aesthetics took its first steps was Johannes Volkelt (1848–1930), who devoted several works on aesthetics, the most important of which are the three-volume work *System der Ästhetik* (1905–1912, substantially revised second version 1925–27) and *Das ästhetische Bewusstsein* (1920), in which he defends the aesthetics of empathy against the "objectivist" attacks of the phenomenologists and the Neo-Kantians (see Thomas Petraschka's article in this issue). Finally, the pioneering experimental psychologist Oswald Külpe (1862–1915) became interested in aesthetic issues in his later career, leading to the posthumously published *Grundlagen der Ästhetik* (1921).

A lot of work remains to be done in mapping the complex relationship early phenomenological aesthetics had with Neo-Kantianism and psychological aesthetics. What is clear is that the early phenomenologists were aware of the aesthetic debates of the time, and non-phenomenological sources influenced the way they approached aesthetic phenomena and envisioned the very identity of phenomenological aesthetics. For instance: one central debate in German aesthetics at the turn of the 20th century had to do with the nature and scope of aesthetics itself and its relationship to philosophy, psychology, and art research. The Neo-Kantians followed the traditional idea that aesthetics is a philosophical discipline and that its laws can be arrived at through purely philosophical means. The psychologists, on the other hand, held that aesthetics can be subsumed under psychology. This debate led Aloys Fischer to claim that "[a]esthetics is today far from being a science that is clear about itself; neither its object, nor its methods, nor the nature and validity of the laws it strives for are fixed."[24]

The early phenomenologists argued that phenomenology could settle this issue. Theodor Conrad (who is not to be confused with the abovementioned Waldemar Conrad) wrote his doctoral dissertation *Definition und Forschungsgehalt der Aesthetik*

(1908) on the topic, arguing that phenomenological aesthetics has a propaedeutic role in figuring out the nature and scope of aesthetics as a science.[25] Conrad comes to the conclusion, which was later shared by other early phenomenological aestheticians, that aesthetics is by nature a "science of aesthetic values" (*Lehre von den ästhetischen Werten*) that cannot be reduced to psychology.[26]

In the seminal paper "Phänomenologische Ästhetik" (1925), Geiger continues on the same lines by arguing that aesthetics and phenomenology have a special relationship. Phenomenology offers a third option that does not approach phenomena deductively "from above" or inductively "from below" but rather goes straight to their essences. The phenomenological method does not impose a top-down theory upon phenomena, like speculative philosophy, but at the same time, it avoids staying on the level of the singular and contingent, like empirical psychology. Moreover, the phenomenological method is more suitable for solving aesthetic problems than speculative philosophy or psychology. According to Geiger, the specific domain of inquiry, which separates aesthetics from other fields, concerns "the universal laws of aesthetic values and with the embodiment of principles in aesthetic objects."[27] In Geiger's view, aesthetic values are neither real properties of objects nor subjective mental states but phenomenal entities that exist only in the encounter of aesthetic objects and the consciousness that perceives them.[28] This way, Geiger argues, phenomenology establishes aesthetics as an "autonomous special science" that is not reducible to speculative philosophy or psychology. Phenomenology, in other words, is the essential method of aesthetic inquiry. Moreover, this special relationship between aesthetics and phenomenology also goes in the other direction: since the main objects of aesthetic inquiry are essentially phenomenal entities, "this special science of aesthetics is to be found perhaps the most outstanding field of application for phenomenological method as such."[29] Yet, like Theodor Conrad before him, Geiger also emphasizes that phenomenology cannot exhaust the whole ambit of aesthetics: phenomenology can only describe *how* things are, but to explain *why* they are so, aesthetics needs to consult other philosophical disciplines.

Another relevant context for the development of phenomenological aesthetics was the initiative to establish a "general science of art" (*Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*). This initiative, driven by the Berlin philosophy professor Max Dessoir (1867–1947) and the Czech philosopher Emil Utitz (1883–1956), aimed at formulating a unified scientific basis for the various disciplines of art research, which, by the turn of the 20th century, had begun to establish themselves as distinct fields of research. This project was initiated in 1906 by Dessoir's programmatic work *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* and the grounding of the journal *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, which was to serve as an important platform for phenomenological aesthetics.[30] The theories developed in the ambit of *Allgemeine Kunstwissenchaft* would also influence phenomenological aesthetics: as Patrick Flack points out in this issue, the notion of aesthetic objectuality (*ästhetische Gegenständlichkeit*) and the strata theory (*Schichtentheorie*) of artworks—which would play a seminal part in early phenomenological aesthetics—were ideas discovered from the theorists of the *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*. However, *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* was not a unified movement in the same way as phenomenology but rather a platform for discussion, where various representatives from aesthetics, art history, and art theory could come together to discuss the fundamental methodological questions of art research. The project produced a flood of publications

and gave birth to the International Congresses for Aesthetics (1913 and 1924 in Berlin, 1927 in Halle, 1930 in Hamburg, and 1937 in Paris),[31] which laid the foundations of the modern-day congresses of the International Association for Aesthetics. Like the original phenomenological movement, the *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* project was cut short by the rise of the Nazis, who saw it as antitraditional and ultimately banned the publication of the *Zeitschrift*. After the Second World War, *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* fell into oblivion, and only in recent years has it started to gain renewed attention.[32] Much work remains to be done in understanding the relationship between early phenomenological aesthetics and *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*.

Besides such meta-aesthetic issues, the early phenomenological aestheticians were interested in the nature of aesthetic objects, aesthetic values, and aesthetic experiences. The early phenomenologists established what Ingarden would come to call "the basic postulate" of aesthetics: aesthetic objects are constituted in and through aesthetic experiences, and aesthetic experiences are essentially directed at the aesthetic values embodied by aesthetic objects.[33] In other words, aesthetic objects and aesthetic experiences are correlative, and neither exists without the other. Inspired by the antipsychologistic and objectivistic tendencies of Husserl's early phenomenology, as well as *Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* and the formalist art theories of Konrad Fiedler (1841–1895) and Adolf von Hildebrand, the early phenomenological aestheticians put more emphasis on the objective side of the correlation. For example, Conrad's "Der ästhetische Gegenstand" and Ingarden's *Das literarische Kunstwerk* use the phenomenological method to unearth the essential features of various types of artworks. The early phenomenologists did not, however, completely cast aside the subjective side of the correlation. For example, Geiger's "Beiträge zur Phänomenologie des ästhetischen Genusses" is an astoundingly detailed analysis of aesthetic pleasure. The essays collected in Geiger's *Zugänge zur Ästhetik* also mostly revolve around the problems of aesthetic experience: Geiger worries that aesthetic subjectivism, which locates the value of art and aesthetic experiences in the emotions they elicit, has started to dominate the way art is made, theorized, and experienced, and questions whether this dominance has become damaging to our relationship to art and aesthetic values; while art, at best, could be challenging and deeply transformative, Geiger worries that we may have started to reduce it to a source of superficial pleasure and entertainment. In the course of several essays, Geiger develops a set of conceptual distinctions that allow him to analyze various kinds of aesthetic experiences with the aim of showing how significant and transformative experiences can be (see Íngrid Vendrell Ferran's article in this issue). Similar criticism of superficial aesthetic experiences will become a recurrent theme in the works of later phenomenologists, such as Ingarden, Heidegger, and Gadamer.

Yet another central theme that emerges quite early on and which would become a regular point in phenomenological aesthetics has to do with the affinity between art and phenomenology. The central aim of Husserl's phenomenological method was achieving a direct, presuppositionless intuition of essences by bracketing the natural attitude and all preconceived ideas that do not stem from the phenomena themselves. Early phenomenological aestheticians quickly pointed out an analogy between the phenomenological method and artistic activity. In the same way, the phenomenologist attempts to catch the essences of phenomena in philosophical prose, the artist aims to do the same in and through the artwork: the painter studies the conditions of visual perception; the musician

works with pure sound; the writer seeks to describe the essences of human characteristics, and so forth. As is well known, this became a central idea in Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics, but before him, the early phenomenologists had already discussed the matter extensively. As early as 1906, Johannes Daubert—who never published anything during his lifetime—argued that impressionism, which he saw as a ubiquitous character of modern art as such, is close to phenomenology in that both aim at capturing the "aesthetic How" (*ästhetisches Wie*) of phenomena, i.e. their modes of appearing.[34] The most significant contribution to this topic, however, is Fritz Kaufmann's abovementioned paper "Kunst und Phänomenologie" (1940).

IV. In place of a conclusion

Early phenomenological aesthetics has been studied so little that it still offers us more questions than conclusions. First, the works of the early phenomenological aestheticians are still little known, and some thinkers—like Maximilian Beck—still wait for scholarly attention. Second, much work remains to be done in mapping the development of phenomenological aesthetics within its wider historical context. Phenomenological aesthetics was far from being just an internal development of the phenomenological movement, as it drew inspiration from and set itself in discussion with other aesthetic currents of the time. Third, more inquiries are needed to trace the transmission of phenomenological aesthetics beyond the German borders; likewise, more work needs to be done in mapping the influence early phenomenological aesthetics has had not only for later phenomenology but for other currents of aesthetics and art research. And finally, fourth, it remains to be assessed how the wealth of early phenomenological aesthetics could benefit today's aesthetic debates. This special issue of the *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* aims to shed light on some of these questions, but it can hardly scratch the surface. Much of this work still lies ahead of us.

Notes

1. Heffernan, "Phenomenology, Psychology, and Ideology," 1.
2. Just to mention a few books and special issues: Balzer-Jaray, *Selected Papers on Early Phenomenology*; Feldes, *Das Phänomenologenheim*; Harding and Kelly, *Early Phenomenology*; Moran and Parker, *Early Phenomenology*; Parker, *The Idealism-Realism Debate*; Płotka and Eldridge, *Early Phenomenology*; Szanto & Moran, *Phenomenology of Sociality*; and Vendrell Ferran, *Die Emotionen*.
3. See, for example, Luft and Hagengruber, *Women Phenomenologists*; Hart, *Hedwig Conrad Martius*; Miron, *Hedwig Conrad-Martius*; Calcagno and Miron, *Hedwig Conrad-Martius*; Calcagno, *Edith Stein*; Vendrell Ferran, *Else Voigtländer*; and Calcagno, *Gerda Walther*.
4. This special issue, edited by Roberto Poli and Gabriele Scaramuzza, appeared in *Axiomathes*, vol. 9, issue 1–2, 1998.
5. Sepp & Embree, *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, ix.
6. See Avé-Lallemant, *Die Nachlässe*.
7. For more robust histories of early phenomenology, see Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*; Salice, "Munich and Göttingen Circles"; and Moran and Parker, "Editors' Introduction."
8. Moran and Parker, "Editors' Introduction," 13.
9. Ibid., 18.

10. Parker, *The Idealism-Realism Debate*.
11. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 168.
12. See de Warren & Vongehr, *Philosophers at the Front*.
13. Jean Héring's term, quoted in Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 166.
14. Schuhmann, "Philosophy and Art," 39–41.
15. Ibid., 41.
16. Ibid., 41–42.
17. De Santis, "Maximilian Beck."
18. Krohn, *Objektivistinen estetiikka*, 8, my translation.
19. Recently, Daniele De Santis has begun to draw attention to Beck: see De Santis, "Maximilian Beck"; De Santis, "A Wrong Conception"; and De Santis, "A Forgotten Episode."
20. For more details on Fischer's aesthetics, see Rollinger, "Phenomenological Aesthetics."
21. Henckmann, "Grundlinien."
22. Collenberg-Plotnikov, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 11.
23. For an overview of Neo-Kantianism, see Noras, *Geschichte des Neukantianismus*.
24. Fischer, "Ästhetik und Kunstwissenschaft," 100, my translation.
25. Scaramuzza, *Le origini*, 96–97.
26. Conrad, *Definition und Forschungsgehalt der Ästhetik*, 53–55.
27. Geiger, *The Significance of Art*, 7.
28. Ibid., 5.
29. Ibid., 16.
30. Flack, "Phenomenological Contributions."
31. Collenberg-Plotnikov, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 10.
32. See Collenberg-Plotnikov, *Die Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*; Maigné et al., "Berlin 1913–Paris 1937"; and Flack, "Phänomenologische Ästhetik."
33. Ingarden, *Selected Papers in Aesthetics*, 34.
34. Schuhmann, "Johannes Daubert als Ästhetiker," 75–76.

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